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Hoaxes
UFO

*Of Assassination and Disinformation:*
*An Interview With Robert Groden*

*By Martin Cannon*

Did William Greer, driver of the presidential limousine on November 22, 1963, turn and fire the fatal head shot at John F. Kennedy?

Yes, claims ex-naval intelligence officer William Cooper. Around the country, this unusual individual has spun increasingly bizarre conspiratorial scenarios before auditoreums gorged with faithful followers, the curious, and the naive. Cooper's outlandish tales of extra-terrestrials, underground bases, the Council On Foreign Relations, and the dreaded Illuminati need not concern us here, although we should note that many of his pronouncements echo the masturbatory fear fantasies familiar to us from the bleatings of the John Birch Society, the Liberty Lobby, the LaRouche organization, and similar right-wing groups.

But Cooper's allegations regarding the doings in Dealey Plaza have, for his audiences, a special resonance - because he backs up his claims with a videotape: A special "uncensored" version of Abraham Zapruder's well-known film of the assassination. Many believe that this "new and improved" edition of a key piece of assassination evidence proves that William Greer turned and fired a handgun at his chief executive.

Is it possible?

The scenario seems unlikely. Dealey Plaza - as anyone who has ever visited it knows - offers numerous excellent locations for hidden hit men to perch, aim, and fire. Why should conspiratorial killers forego the shadows and do the dirty job out in the open, in front of witnesses?

Yet the videotape - a cropped, black-and-white version of Zapruder's famous footage - does present the viewer with a visual anomaly that could, with a certain amount of squinting and a lot of prompting, be interpreted as a gun held by Secret Service agent Greer. The alleged weapon appears at exactly that point when the driver turns around to witness the final, fatal explosion of the right side of Kennedy's head.

Cooper claims that unknown bar-sinisters removed the frames showing the gun. Yet these frames (Z-300 to Z-313) have *always* been present and acounted for, and can be seen (though not particularly clearly) in the Warren Commission records. Granted, some images in Zapruder's 8mm roll of film have mysteriously disappeared - specifically, frames 155-156 and 208-211. Suspicious as these excisions are, they occur much earlier in the sequence and do not bear on Cooper's claims.

In order to clear up the matter once and for all, I interviewed Robert Groden, author of the excellent book *High Treason*, and acknowledged expert on the photographic evidence surrounding the assassination. Groden, a bold yet sensible critic of the Warren Commission, examined the actual film which went spinning through Abraham Zapruder's

camera. No other researcher could offer better testimony as to what is or is not on that strip of celluloid.

My interview with Groden was supplemented by correspondence from Lars Hansson, a volunteer with the Christic Institute, who first provided Cooper with his version of the Zapruder film. Hansson, a well-intentioned individual who has done outstanding work in other areas, maintains that he is not himself entirely convinced by the driver-did-it theory, and has expressed his outrage that Cooper would make unqualified statements regarding the controversy.

Ultimately, the "Greer" thesis represents a small fire, easily extingushed. But the best way to stop fires is to prevent them, and the following interview should provide the reader with a few interesting insights into the ways misinformation - and disinformation - enters into JFK research and other political controversies. We can learn much from this assassination sideshow - much about what *actually* went on in Dealey Plaza, and (more importantly) much about the ways in which the JFK inquest has been "handled" ever since.

Groden also touches on a nuber of other issues which will certainly interest students of JFK's murder.

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CANNON: I'm calling to get some expert validation for my suspicions regarding this video which allegedly shows JFK being shot by his driver. This footage has now acheived wide prominence - particularly in UFO-oriented circles, for some reason. I'm guessing that the film does not, in fact, show what some purport that it shows.

GRODEN: That is correct. Indeed, Bill Greer, the driver of the car, *does* turn around, and does look over his shoulder - twice, as a matter of fact. But his hands never leave the steering wheel, and that which is purported to be a gun, or a gun-shape, is in fact simply the reflection off of the forehead of the man who is riding next to Bill Greer. His name is Roy Kellerman. On clear copies of the film it's very easy to see this.

What the perpetrators of that tape have done is degrade the image to the point where you have no shades of grey, no skin tones. All you've got is blacks and whites, and all you can see is the light of the reflection against the darkness of the background.

CANNON: I would like to ask about the origins of the tape. You have said elsewhere that that version of the Zapruder film had been originally created by you in conjunction with your work with the House Select Committee on Assassinations.

GRODEN: That's correct. That particular copy was from a 16mm film that was transferred in Dallas, Texas, in 1975. The purpose of the transfer in the first place was to show it publicly on the public television station there. But the management of the station changed their minds and refused to show the film. So I requested to have it back. They wouldn't give it to me. That was the source of the bootlegs. The arrow that appears from time to time is *me*, holding a hand-held projection pointer.

This film has been bootlegged for years. But even the bootlegs are of a much clearer quality than *this*.

CANNON: Lars Hansson tells me that the first people who told him of the Greer-shot-Kennedy thesis were Perry Adams and Fred Newcombe...

GRODEN: Yes, I've known them for years. But the point is this: The reason I did my optical rotoscopes in the first place was to determine whether or not shots *were* fired from that point. This had been a point of conjecture for years, that Greer may have been involved in some way.

So I rotoscoped that section to prove the point one way or the other. He did not fire a shot. Neither of them fired a shot.

What we do have, though, is the proof that the Secret Service driver, Bill Greer, gave false testimony to the Warren Commission. He said he turned around once; in fact, he turned twice. He also said he was not looking at the president at the time of the head shot, and indeed he was. He also said that after he turned around the first time he hit the accelerator and took off. He did not. He continued to slow down until after the head shot. This is the real issue that needs to answered in relation to Bill Greer - why his actions were so bad and so incompetent.

CANNON: Of course, I've always wondered, ever since I saw the degraded version of the film, why - even if that *was* a gun - there was no smoke, there was no backfire...

GRODEN: You're absolutely right. In addition to this: If you look at the position where that "gun" would be if it were a gun, it's at the height of his head. Which means Greer would have had to reach up over his shoulder, holding it up with his arm. You can't see his arm, because his arm simply *isn't there.* There's nothing attached to this shape.

It's a moot point. My clear copies of the film clearly show Bill Greer's face, and show Roy Kellerman's face. And you can watch the reflection of the sun, and you can see it get larger and smaller as Kellerman goes farther forward and farther back. And the shadow cast by the sun visor in front of the windshield hits his forehead, so it gets taller and shorter depending on how far foreward he sits.

CANNON: I guess my primary interest in this theory at this point has to do with this question: Are we dealing with a *mistake* that arose accidentally, or is it something that has been intentionally trumped up in order to set up a straw man argument, the ultimate goal of which is to embarass critics of the Warren Commission?

GRODEN: It's not as though I'm totally unknown in this field. For the last 15 or 16 years, I've been considered the world's leading expert on the photographic evidence in the case. I'm not saying that to toot my own horn. I'm saying that to make this point: If anybody had any photographic issue that they really wanted to consider, they at least - if they were *serious* about it - would have come to me and asked my opinion. They don't have to agree with me. But if they were concerned about it, if they cared at all, they certainly would have come to me.

The copyright of the film that they used mentions that I am the source. What they are doing now is bootlegging my material and selling it to promote an absolute falsehood.

So to answer your question: *Yes.* I think that this is being done as a disinformation situation, to embarass and to ridicule the legitimate critics of the Report.

CANNON: You know, the legalities of this are fairly interesting: You seem to be bothered that the film you originally produced is now being sold to promote this thesis, and Lars Hansson has just written me to say that *he's* bothered about Cooper selling copies of this film. You're both expressing a proprietary interest.

GRODEN: What Lars Hansson produced was a five-minute mini-documentary utilizing my film. I had nothing to do with the production of that. I certainly would never have put forward the possibility that Greer shot Kennedy, because I know better. It's obvious. It's on film from both sides of the street. *[Note: Grodin refers to the Nix film, which nobody has ever claimed shows evidence of Greer having pulled out a weapon.]*

CANNON: Again, my primary interest is in the question of whether or not this theory is being *intentionally* disseminated. In that light, I'd like to get back to the sources for this thesis. Basically, what I want to know is this: Were these people mistaken - or were they *lying*? That's why I mentioned Newcombe and Adams, because they appear to be the ones who first got Hansson walking down this trail.

GRODEN: I honestly don't know. I'd like to hear from people like Fred and Perry - what they actually *did* say. They may have presented it as a possible hypothesis. Fred is normally a much more serious critic than that. I can't believe that he would put forward such a statement. He certainly knows me - if he had any question he certainly should have talked with me about it.

CANNON: Hansson also says that his copy of your film was originally provided to him by a man named Brian Quig, who apparently worked with the HSCA...

GRODEN: I've never heard of him in my life. He certainly didn't get it from me.

CANNON: So, if we assume that Lars Hansson played a "useful idiot" role in all this, it could well be that it was this man Quig who originally got the ball rolling.

GRODEN: *Ah.* Well, that could well be.

You see, disinformation is nothing new. Whenever we've gotten close to doing something important in this case, somebody comes forward with some hair-brained idea, and uses people with good intentions, and turns them into tools of disinformation, whether they mean to be or not.

You know, I've seen two different versions of this film. One of them is much worse than the other, but even the better of the two is still useless. What it is, is basically the power of suggestion. They're showing people the worst possible quality picture, and telling them what they're seeing. They see it over and over again. And after awhile, people say "Oh, yeah...!" And it's absolute garbage.

Now, one of the dangers of this is that people will start to pay a lot of attention to a false issue, and they will invest their own belief in it. And this theory is so easily knocked out, that people will say "Oh gosh, we were used; I guess there was no conspiracy." If people believe that there's a conspiracy because they think that Bill Greer fired the shot, that's the wrong reason. There's a million bits of evidence that point to conspiracy, but that's not one of them.

CANNON: Right. I know that I've talked to at least one attendee of Cooper's lectures, who, when I mentioned that I thought the Greer-shot-Kennedy thesis was buncombe, replied: "Oh yeah? You think *Oswald* did it?" These people can't understand the concept of the false dichotomy.

GRODEN: There you go. It's all or nothing. That's the way people look at it: Either all of the evidence is legitimate, or none of it is. And that's the most horrible situation to be in.

Nobody would spread this, knowingly, having seen the evidence, unless they were trying to create disinformation. That's the way it looks to me.

CANNON: I wanted to ask about the book *Farewell America*, which apparently is the first mention in print of this thesis. The story is that the French SDECE [*that country's equivalent to our CIA*] was responsible for that book. Is it possible that the French just got it wrong?

GRODEN: Obviously, they got it wrong. See, that book was written before I had ever released any clear copies of the film. Don't forget: Nobody had ever seen a clear copy of the film until I released it in 1975 on *Goodnight America*, with Geraldo Rivera. Up until then, all we had were individual frames that had been printed in *Life* magazine. And for the lucky few who had copies of the Warren Commission testimony and exhibits, in volume 18 they could see fuzzy copies in black and white. So it would be very easy to look at the printed page, which was nothing but black and white, and say "Oh, hey - look! That looks like a gun!" It's like a Rorshach test. You can see whatever you want in those things.

But even if you look at the frames in *Life* magazine - you can see clearly that the shape that they're calling a gun is nothing more than the light reflected off the top of Kellerman's hair and forehead. The truth is there.

If anyone had any question, they could go and see for themselves. They can look at clear, pristine copies right from the original. They could go to the National Archives in Washington and look at the 4x5 transparencies, which are clear as a bell. They were made directly off the original back in 1964.

CANNON: Can I ask about a very similar brouhaha - the umbrella man hypothesis? I'm thinking of Robert Cutler's accusations re: Gordon Novel. [*Note: Culter's book* Day of the Umbrella Man *posits that the famed "umbrella man," who mysteriously opened his umbrella just as Kennedy's car passed by, actually fired a poison-filled flechette at the president using an advanced weapon built into the umbrella's rib. Cutler tentatively - and, I think, mistakenly - identifies New Orleans private detective Gordon Novel as the brolly-weilding "hit man." Novel,*

*who has often been accused of operating on the government's behalf, figured in Jim Garrison's probe of the assassination.]*

GRODEN: I have a hard time dealing with that, personally. I know that Bob Cutler is saying it in good faith. He believes what he's saying, and there is some evidence to back up the possibility. That evidence being that CIA did indeed have such a weapon at that time.

The problem I have is: First of all, if you're going to take a chance on being detected firing anything at the president, you may as well fire a bullet, rather than a dart, because the dart's really not going to accomplish very much. Besides, by the time the president passes by the umbrella man, he has already been hit once. And one shot's been fired that has already missed. And then the president is struck, and thrown downward and foreward. So you have three shots before Connally is even hit. Why even bother with a dart?

I'm not saying it isn't possible. I'm saying that it's just not very likely.

CANNON: I've always felt that, despite whatever James Bond technology they might have had in 1963, it doesn't seem very likely that you could fire a projectile from the rib of an umbrella without any visible backfire on the umbrella's part...

GRODEN: You mean the kick? Well, yeah, for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.

I personally think the umbrella man was involved; I think he was a visual signal. I could be wrong about that. I'm not dogmatic about it.

CANNON: For some reason, Gordon Novel has entered the UFO field lately...

GRODEN: Don't forget, the day Clay Shaw died, if you read Jack Anderson's column, there's a mention of Gordon Novel. Chuck Colson was going to hire him to build a de-guassing gun to aim at the White House to erase the tapes. So *nothing* would surprise me.

CANNON: There was also that bizarre editorial in *The Rebel* magazine, in which publisher Larry Flynt wrote that Gordon Novel came to him with a deal regarding the Vicki Morgan tapes.

GRODEN: That's right. I remember that because I was working for Larry at the time. I remember that very well.

CANNON: Do you have any idea what that was all about?

GRODEN: No...I know that he was mentioned, that Gordon was supposed to be the source.

When we were doing *Rebel* magazine, I was the associate editor. It had nothing to do with *Hustler [Flynt's other, more notorious publication].* We were doing some investigation of the Kennedy case at the time that Larry had to go to Butner, the federal penitentiary. Of course, Bill Rider and the others - the minute Larry was behind bars, they just took over. They didn't listen to anything that Larry said.

Larry would call up and give them orders, and they would just laugh at him. They wouldn't do anything that he asked for. They fired everybody, closed down the magazine - it was just a very, very weird situation.

That's the last time I ever saw Larry. In all the years since, I've been trying to reach him. No-one will ever put a call through from anybody. He's totally isolated.

CANNON: Did Novel make the Vicki Morgan tapes available to Flynt?

GRODEN: As far as I know, he's the one who found them. He got them from the source.

CANNON: Well. That's a very unusual story.

GRODEN: That's what I heard. I have no proof of that. Who knows what the situation is? I have no idea why Novel's interested in UFOs now...

The thing is, what scares the heck out of me at this stage of the game is that the majority of society tends to categorize people who believe in UFOs as flakes. I don't really have an opinion one way or the other - I think UFOs need to be proven or disproven. I don't put anybody down for believing in UFOs. But: By bringing UFOs and the Kennedy assassination together it also tends to steal credibility away from legitimate critics, who are interested in the Kennedy case and have no interest in UFOs.

The first person who ever called me *[about the Greer-did-it theory]* was some lunatic from Las Vegas who wanted me to appear on a radio show backing this garbage theory. And he sounded very violent on the phone. He said "Well, obviously *you're* part of the cover-up because you don't believe Greer did it; you're lying about it." As if everybody knows it as a fact.

I said to him, "Well, why would they *do* that?" He answered: "President Kennedy had seen a UFO and was about to hold a press conference and release the information." Jesus Christ! That's the stupidest, dumbest thing I've ever heard! In my 25 years of investigating the case, I've never heard a more hair-brained scheme.

CANNON: This has little to do with the line of inquiry I've been pursuing, but I wanted to ask a few questions regarding the assertions in your book re: the autopsy photographs. *[Note: These photographs are controversial because they show no rear exit defect.]* You have been saying for some time that the ones that have been released are forgeries.

GRODEN: Yes. At least the ones showing the rear of the head. Possibly more; possibly all of them are fake. It's beyond question. We have something like 26 witnesses to prove it. The man who *took* the photographs said that they're fakes. The man who took the x-rays said that they're fakes. The doctors - every one of the doctors that I've shown them to has said that they're fakes. Mrs. Kennedy in her testimony implies that they're fakes. Witnesses in the Plaza who were never asked about the head wounds have now come forward and said that the rear of the head was blasted out.

CANNON: What I'm wondering about is this: Not only do you have fake autopsy photos and fake x-rays, but these two fakes don't mesh with each other.

GRODEN: That's the weird part of it. When you look at them side-by-side, they don't even match each other. The explanation for that seems to be that they were done at different places at different times. And there was different technology used in each. Photography and radiology are two different fields altogether.

It appears to me that the *apparent* image in the Zapruder film is what was used to as a guide to create the x-rays. Although the x-rays don't depict the same wound as appears in the film, they accurately depict what the film allegedly would show if you can't analyse it correctly. That's what I find really fascinating.

*[Note: Groden's point may require some clarification. He refers here to the fact that the bullet drove Kennedy's head to the left - away from Zapruder's camera. Thus, on many frames of the film, you can't see the rear wound, because the back of the head wasn't within Zapruder's line of sight. However, later frames - such as Z-335, reproduced in color in Groden's book - do show the rear exit hole.]*

CANNON: Do you think there ought to be a movement to re-open the case on an official level?

GRODEN: Sure, of course!

CANNON: But it seems to me that, after what happened to the House Select Committee on Assassinations in the '70s, you would wonder: "Why bother?" It would seem that the real battle now is for *history's* verdict.

GRODEN: History doesn't *believe* the garbage. What we're trying to do is get it re-opened in an open forum, not behind closed doors. Where it's done in the public eye. Where they let the *critics* get involved in this. Where they won't let a Robert Blakey pull this kind of crap.

Don't forget, I dealt with the original first guard in this - with Dick Sprague, Bob Tannenbaum, all the rest, people who really cared about this case and really wanted to re-open it. They knew there was a conspiracy. They knew where it led. They knew how far it went. And they really were going to do a job. But the government manipulated the committee to the point where Blakey and crew came in - and you know, they didn't need the whole organization to be corrupt; they just needed the one guy at the top who had absolute say over what gets done or doesn't get done.

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Thus ended a conversation which touched on many points, yet revolved around a single thesis: Manipulation and disinformation, and how little lies can warp big truths.

The fringe-dwellers and flying saucerites who have fastened themselves onto the JFK controversy shall eventually skulk away - but not before they've inflicted their damage. Hence, the true significance of

this controversy-within-the-controversy. Genuine researchers can easily dismiss odd individuals such as William Cooper - yet we must recognize one sobering fact: Sensationalists of his stripe are heard by *many* thousands more people than will ever read Robert Groden's masterly analysis of the assassination.

Surely, some would argue, we should simply ignore the rumormongers and disinformationists? Surely we should let them play out their bizarre melodramas without the dignity of review?

*No.* We turn away from the willful prevaricators at our peril.

Loud voices telling simple and (to the untutored) fetching scenarios have always gathered crowds - which is why so many thousands of well-meaning, questioning individuals, seeking alternatives to the Establishment lies of a managed media, have turned toward lies of a different, more ominous sort. In a previous generation, men like Father Charles Coughlin and William Dudley Pelley spread such falsehoods. Today, subtle calumnies come from their ideological heirs, who spearhead various fringe movements and use gaudy - but perrenially popular - controversies, such as UFOs and political assassinations, as a means to huckster new crowds with the old snake oil.

How, then, do the "old hands" of the assassination investigations explain the true facts to a new crop of potential critics of the established view? As someone who has only recently educated himself on these topics, I am particularly concerned about others of my generation, and about those who are younger still: the idealistic and ingenuous college students who might want to bring their peculiar energy to the mystery -- a mystery whose continuing significance lies, not least, in its radicalizing potential, in its persistent ability to help clarify the stories behind the stories we see in our daily newspapers.

The new arrivals know nothing of the pettifogging, the in-fighting, the manufactured despair and engineered inertia which have hampered previous research. If properly instructed and sufficently intrigued, they might press vigorousiy for the honest re-investigation Groden calls for. Or, mindful of the mistakes of the past, they might insist, more forcefully than ever did their parents, that new scandals receive the proper inquiry denied the JFK case.

Unfortunately, newcomers are caught between the Scylla of official blandishments and the Charybdis of the sensationalists. Those two opposing forces can crush the life out of any thorough and scholarly understanding of what took place in Dealey Plaza.

That ineffably haunting piece of Dallas real estate remains, and always will remain, a fascinating area to explore, and we should welcome any opportunity to spend some time there - either literally or figuratively - in order to examine the mechanics of the murder. But, of course, we must eventually leave the assassination site, and trace the heirarchy of the hit beyond the actual trigger men. We need to find the men *behind* the men behind the guns.

These men, to a large extent, are *known.* In manuscripts such as Peter Dale Scott's *The Dallas Conspiracy*, as well as in the recent published works of Jim Marrs, Jim Garrison, and - of course - Robert Groden, we see names named and fingers pointed.

The engineers of clandestine crime are far more vulnerable than most people realize. Nothing save disinformation - lies - mere *words* - has ever shielded them. What is needed, then, is a willingness to understand the inner logic of the lies, and to deal with the disinformation

head on. God is found in the details - details such as those which Robert Groden has so graciously provided here.

Cooper, and those who are like unto Cooper, have, by inflaming a false issue within a very real conspiracy, managed to make the very notion of conspiracy seem risible. And not just in the JFK case.

Recently, dwellers on the fringe (who often promulgate a transparently-disguised far-right-wing agenda) have latched themselves onto a number of important controversies: AIDS, banking scandals, covert actions, the restriction of civil liberties, mind control, governmental complicity in drug smuggling, and so on. By spreading false and ridiculous answers to these genuine questions, the sensation-mongers have discredited responsible revisionists.

Needless to say, these responsible revisionists include among their number honest men who make honest mistakes - as has, I suspect, longtime assassination researcher Robert Cutler. We should never let our distaste for disinformation become the foundation for an inquisition against all those who hold views different from our own.

But the fact remains: The JFK assassination, and other scandals, have long attracted the attention of those who would promulgate *dis*honest error. And while we cannot prove beyond doubt that pushers of the "Greer" line belong in this category, Robert Groden's instincts on this score deserve respect.

Recognizing the prevaricators is easy. They substitute bluster for argument. They fixate on minutia while ignoring vast warehouses of evidence. They rely on "inside information" which cannot be cross-checked. They display a near-neurotic avoidance of the words "maybe" and "perhaps." And they flee like scattering cockroaches whenever someone switches on the light of reasoned debate. Truth, or the closest approximation thereof human beings can muster, lies in the exchange of opposing views; those who shun this process of give-and-take must, therefore, be interested in something other than truth.

Disinformationists have made a science of buncombe. We need to make a science of exposing their frauds.